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× ANNUAL REPORT OF EXTENSION WORK 1951-52;

CONSUMER EDUCATION IN FOOD MARKETING ×

by

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Helping Millions of Food Shoppers

There are now 33 consumer food-marketing specialists working in 25 States and Puerto Rico under funds provided by the Research and Marketing Act of 1946. Some of the States are conducting urban projects, some are operating on a State-wide basis, and in some cases, where market centers serve several States, they are cooperating in regional projects.

The Extension Service program in consumer education in food marketing helps millions of food shoppers get more dollar value and food value from the money spent and gain a better understanding of the marketing system. It helps producers and handlers, too.

Extension agents are called upon for an increasing amount of food-buying information. A typical example is described in the annual report of the home agent in Union County, N. J.: "Extension work is an accepted activity by more than 12,000 homemakers of record and several thousand more news column readers. . . . Food information continues to be the greatest need expressed. Buying food is one of the most needed aspects of food information. . . . Increased interest in help with buying and handling food came spontaneously as a result of price spiraling and pressure on the family pocketbook. The agent found herself giving more and more time to meetings on 'Getting Your Money's Worth in Food.' The agent has a daily column in the Elizabeth Daily Journal. Once a week this column is devoted to food-buying information. The agent gets most of her information on food buying from the New York Metropolitan Area Food Marketing Office."

Food writers also have expressed a need for food-buying information. The foods editor for the New York Times reported that in a recent survey of 5,000 women who read the Times, 80 percent read the food page. These women listed food-marketing

news as second in order of interest among the various phases of food information. Buymanship has become one of the major problems of American families.

In carrying out this program, the consumer education specialist (1) obtains information on availability and price of food; food buying, use, and care; and marketing practices, (2) interprets information as it relates to the consumer's interest and welfare, and (3) disseminates information.

It is not enough that specialists gather and interpret timely, pertinent food-buying information. Each specialist has a marketing job of his own to perform. That job is to get the information passed on to the thousands of food shoppers. Radio, television, and newspapers are major outlets. In addition, much of the success of the program depends on the use of the information by others who work with food shoppers.

Ten Educational Tools

During 1952, ten major educational tools were used to disseminate food-marketing information. Not all of these were used in any one project.

1. Regular food information releases.--Specialists on 11 projects prepare a weekly release. For the most part these are sent only to professional workers. In New England, for example, about 3,000 are sent each week to radio people, newspaper editors, commercial home economists, public health workers, hospital personnel, public utility demonstrators, teachers, dietitians, nutritionists, advertising agencies, press services, magazine editors, libraries, extension agents, and the like.

These releases contain information on food supplies, price, selection, care, use, marketing processes, research work, and other current information of interest to food shoppers. They contain enough background material so that these professional workers can write their own stories from the material, work up demonstrations, prepare radio scripts, and work the material into other parts of their program. These professional people have come to rely very much on the extension food-marketing specialists for this type of information. They adapt the material to meet the needs of their clientele.

It would be impossible for the consumer education specialist, alone, to prepare the material to meet the needs of the many different groups, or to give it the time, place, and form that would be most effective. Age, income, education, nationality, and religion all influence food shopping habits. The other professional people know, more specifically, the groups

they are working with and how the material can best be used. The public health nurses, for example, often have personal conferences, giving food-buying information; labor union nutritionists put out their own house organs incorporating the food-buying information; and workers with special religious and nationality groups translate the material into the language used by those they come in contact with.

In Brockton, Mass., one public utility company demonstrator gives cooking schools to approximately 5,000 people annually. The food-marketing information is used in the cooking schools. This demonstrator said, "The information in the Food Marketing Bulletin is really a tremendous help. It gathers together very neatly such a lot of marketing information that we could not have the time or facilities to get."

Two projects have semimonthly releases, and three have monthly releases. These are, in general, sent directly to consumers on request and are used in the less urban areas.

2. Radio.--Eighteen of the specialists either provide a regular radio script service to other broadcasters or have programs themselves. Many of them do both. In Louisville, Ky., the specialist has a weekly 15-minute program of her own and, in addition, provides daily spot announcements for the radio farm director. In Oklahoma, Washington, and New Mexico, regular tape recordings are sent out to the various stations in the area.

Extension agents in the counties have found the script service of particular help to them. Most agents who have access to a radio station have at least one broadcast weekly.

3. Television.--All specialists having access to television are doing at least an occasional show. Four have their own weekly program, one has two shows a week, and six have monthly shows. In addition, many county extension agents have shows on which food-marketing information is given. The home demonstration agent in Newark, N. J., for example, has a weekly half-hour show on which the last portion is devoted to good food buys. She has a viewing audience of 80,000. The specialist in Louisville, Ky., has had a weekly show for some time which proved so successful it was expanded to twice weekly. The specialist in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area is on a weekly show rated as having one of the largest viewing audiences of any daytime program in the area.

Ohio is now operating a consumer education project giving information entirely by television. Ohio's largest broadcasting facility has offered them Class A television time once each week on its network of three stations--Cincinnati, Dayton, and Columbus. This affords coverage of more than half of the State.

Michigan has just completed a series of television movies. The consumer education specialist has cooperated with other marketing

specialists in producing these television "shorts."

Television offers an opportunity to acquaint vast numbers of people with extension work not formerly reached.

4. Newspaper releases.--Special newspaper articles are issued weekly from the offices of 10 of the projects. In some cases, these are sent only to the extension agents to be localized and issued in their columns, and in others they are submitted directly to the paper. Some of the larger papers in the country that have food editors prefer to write their own columns from the weekly food-marketing bulletin material, but others want the article prepared by the specialists.

In Salt Lake City, for example, a weekly feature article dealing with one or more food items in plentiful supply and reasonably priced is written by the consumer education specialist and published in the Salt Lake Tribune. These articles appear on the food page of the women's section. The Tribune has a circulation of 127,000, covering the State of Utah and parts of neighboring States. The Deseret News, in Salt Lake, carries two weekly articles. It has a circulation of 103,000. In Kansas, the Extension Service sends weekly news releases to 400 Kansas weeklies.

5. Demonstrations and consumer meetings.--The small number of people that can be reached and the time it takes for preparation limit the use made of meetings. However, all specialists do some of this work to keep in contact with the people and to know their problems better. In Ogden, Utah, the specialist has a regular monthly demonstration held in the public utility kitchen. The specialists in St. Louis have done a great deal with consumer meetings to help establish strong local support for the program. They now have an Extension Association of Metropolitan St. Louis made up of representatives from various organizations in the city. One of the responsibilities of this group will be to raise local funds for the support of the project. The requests received for giving talks to various groups far exceed the time specialists have for this work.

6. Tours.--Specialists in four of the projects have conducted tours of market facilities. Extension agents, consumers, and producer groups have all participated in these tours. It helps consumers and producers better understand each other's problems and makes much of the information put out by the consumer education specialists more meaningful to agents.

7. Agent training meetings.--To help county extension agents incorporate food-marketing information into their programs, special training meetings have been held in several areas. New Mexico has held two workshops, giving help with demonstration material, newspaper writing, radio broadcasts, 4-H consumer education work, and the like. The regional programs,

especially, have relied heavily on agents to help get out consumer education material. In addition, agricultural agents furnish much information on crop conditions and movements.

Individual conferences have been held with agents and annual 1- or 2-day group conferences have been held in some places. These meetings also help the specialists know what problems confront the agents and what help and information is most beneficial to them.

The Kansas City, Mo., specialists on the regional project hold 2-day conferences for various commodity specialists in the States in their area. These meetings provide an opportunity for the specialists to coordinate their work and to develop plans for new marketing work.

8. Leader training.--This method is used primarily in State-wide projects, and through regular organized extension groups. Many of the urban projects have no such groups to work through.

In Alabama, training meetings have been held for 29 county-wide home demonstration clubs. These 796 leaders who received training have been responsible for giving this information to the members of their clubs. The demonstrations given were on "Labels," "Stretching the Food Dollar," and "Selecting and Storing Fruit."

In Kansas, in 5 counties, 164 leaders were trained in informative labeling, grade labeling, and in critically analyzing shopping habits and techniques. There are 41,766 homemakers in these units. In addition, 2,500 leaders get a monthly news letter. These leaders pass on the information in the news letter to others in their group.

Montana held four leader-training meetings in 1952. They were on "Buying Packaged Foods," "Buying Food for the Family," "Buying Meat," and "Buying Protein Foods."

Many of the consumer education specialists cooperate with other specialists in developing leader-training programs.

9. Releases for small institutions.--Specialists on three of the projects are issuing weekly bulletins designed for use in small institutions, such as nursing homes, homes for the aged, nursery schools, convalescent homes, and the like. The request for this kind of information came from various governmental and private agencies working with these institutions. Many of these small institutions have no trained help and are operating on very limited budgets. Food-buying information and quantity recipes are included in each issue. Over a thousand such institutions are now receiving weekly information from the three project offices. The increasing demand for such a release indicates its helpfulness.

10. Other activities.--Special consumer bulletins have been written by many of the specialists during 1952. Among some of these are Pecans, in Oklahoma; Milk, in Connecticut; Buying Fruits and Vegetables, in Kansas; and two food calendars helping consumers know the time of year when various commodities could be expected to be most plentiful, put out by Missouri and West Virginia project leaders.

Workers on the two New York projects, State and regional, are cooperating on writing a Food Marketing Handbook being issued on a commodity basis to serve as a reference for professional workers. It gives both agricultural economics and home economics information on many of the major food commodities. Persons in resident teaching, research, and extension in the State colleges of agriculture and home economics have helped to select and interpret pertinent material.

The New York State project specialists have just released a bulletin giving the seasonal variation in retail food prices in New York City for the 1948-51 period. Foods are ranked according to price per pound and price per serving. It is also a reference for professional workers who provide information for consumers. The information is also useful for menu planners and buyers for institutions.

Several specialists have also been called upon to prepare exhibits for fairs, achievement days, farm and home weeks, and various community observances, such as nutrition month.

States Participating in RMA Consumer
Programs, and Persons Employed

State	RMA urban programs for consumers	State-wide programs for consumers	Cooperating in regional programs
Alabama	-	1	-
Arkansas	-	-	*
Connecticut	-	1	*
Kansas	-	1	*
Kentucky	1	-	-
Maine	-	-	*
Maryland	1	-	-
Massachusetts	-	-	3
Michigan	-	2	-
Minnesota	1	-	-
Missouri	2	-	2
Montana	-	1	-
Nebraska	-	-	*
New Hampshire	-	-	*
New Jersey	-	-	*
New Mexico	-	1	-
New York	-	3	3
Ohio	-	1	*
Oklahoma	-	1	-
Rhode Island	-	-	*
Puerto Rico	-	2	-
Vermont	-	-	*
Utah	2	-	-
Washington	1	-	-
West Virginia	1	-	1
Wisconsin	1	-	-
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Number of persons	10	14	9

Federal Office Participation

Assistance to States in developing educational programs to improve food-buying practices is provided by the Consumer Education and Marketing Information Section. During the past 2 years one extension economist in consumer education and one marketing specialist participated in State and regional conferences for planning, demonstration, and evaluation of educational programs for consumers.

A Handbook for Extension Workers in Food Marketing was prepared and distributed. Ten television shorts; produced by the Department, were prepared and distributed to several States participating in television programs. Leaflets giving How To Choose and Use information for 12 fruits and vegetables were prepared and made available for distribution by State project leaders. A bulletin entitled "Extension Work in Consumer Food-Marketing Education" was distributed to help introduce the consumer education program.

On the basis of State plans of work, progress statements, and annual reports, together with information assembled when assisting project leaders, the Federal office staff prepares reports for use by the Department. These reports serve as guides to developing consumer education programs in new areas, as well as stepping stones to better programs in the States now participating in this work.

Development of contracts and other financing arrangements are also part of the work of the Federal office. Participation in working groups ancillary to the RMA advisory committees provides for the development of educational work in proportion to the availability of information dealing with marketing problems of consumers.

Cooperation in Consumer Programs

To reach so many people with so many food facts calls for the cooperation of many agencies and many leaders in educational work. Acknowledgement is made for cooperation during the past year by State extension services, Federal staff members, industry representatives, and other associated agencies. Growing interest in this program reflects the public recognition that this educational work serves producers and handlers as well as consumers of farm products.